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FEARLESSNESS: THE SEVENTH ELEMENT OF DRAMA

by

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B.A. Augustana College, 1997

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ABSTRACT

Aristotle proclaimed in his *Poetics* that there were six elements to drama: spectacle, music, diction, thought, character, and plot. This paper will analyze the play *Thom Pain (based on nothing)* against these six elements. I will discuss the aspects of each element that are present in the show as well as the ideas and concepts my director, Tad Ingram, and I brought to the show. Through the rehearsal and performance process I discovered a seventh element; the element of fearlessness. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle does not fully address what the actor brings to the performance and this aspect is just as important as what the script and staging bring to the performance.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

About five years ago I saw a play that significantly influenced my decision to return to college to obtain my MFA in Acting. I was living in Omaha, NE and was participating in some staged readings at the Great Plains Theatre Conference. During the conference I had the pleasure of seeing a production of *Thom Pain (based on nothing)*, a play I knew nothing about. The play has only one character, lasts for a little over an hour, has no set, and very few props. I was mesmerized by how the actor was able to hold the audiences' attention in spite of the lack of theatrical accoutrements. His performance seemed effortless and I wondered how he was able to do this.

Two years later during my first year of grad school Julia Listengarten, my Research Methods teacher, informed our class that it was never too early to begin thinking about what we might like to do for a thesis project. She told our class that past students had chosen to put on one-person shows as it was an opportunity to perform as well as a good tool for the actor since sometimes we must create our own work to showcase our talents. I almost immediately began thinking about *Thom Pain* and thought that putting on that show would be an excellent choice for a thesis project. Within months though I had started thinking about other possibilities and throughout the next year and a half I jumped from idea to idea about what I would like to research for my thesis. I then decided to go back to my first idea and put together a performance of this piece. I determined there must be some element of drama that is utilized to hold

the audience's attention despite limited theatrical conventions. I would explore this as part of my thesis project.

Before I began rehearsals I read some of the Will Eno's previous works to see if there was any additional information that might be helpful in my exploration of this piece. I read a book of his short plays entitled *OH, THE HUMANITY and other good intentions*. Within this piece are two short plays that each have only one character. I looked for similarities between these pieces and *Thom Pain*. The first play is titled *Behold the Coach, In Sorrow, Uninsured*. It is basically one long monologue delivered by a sports team coach at a news conference discussing the past season. The coach has told the reporters at the conference that the team did not have a very good year. The first similarity between this character and Thom is that both openly state what they are thinking regardless of the appropriateness of the comment. The coach has explained to the reporters that he is upset about the team's performance and his own life. In one passage the coach is talking about an experience he had while in a grocery store: "I just wanted to grab a courtesy phone and beg into it: 'Could someone come to the front of the store and clean up the spill that is my life on this earth? Could somebody please just somehow help me through this punishing crushing nauseating sorrow?'" (10) There is also a certain dry wit that is present in this piece. When summing up the team's last year, the coach says "So that's what this last year was. We had to look hard at a few things and, surprise surprise, we found that they looked hard back." (10) The next similarity is that characters in both pieces shift direction very

quickly, sometimes in the same sentence. The coach is discussing what it was like playing through last season "It was the life, it really was, and, granted, yeah, no, this was not the greatest year." (10) A final facet of both characters is that they look at life or their circumstances in many different ways and will voice what those ways are. The coach is continuing to talk about his present circumstances and says:

I came home and went out, walking. My eyes all runny, just walking,
counting up the things I don't have anymore, thinking of the Fair Lady of
my own incompetent sonnets. Who I lost, by the way. Or, failed to win.
Or, forfeited, in some miserable show of inwardness, or downwardness, or
shame. (10)

Looking at the other play with only one character I again noticed some of the same similarities. The second play is titled *Enter the Spokeswoman, Sideways*. It is one long monologue by a spokeswoman for an airline speaking at a press conference regarding the recent crash of one of the companies planes. Again the character speaks what they are thinking despite how it sounds. When discussing why the plane crashed the woman says "As for why, it is as of tonight, undetermined. Who knows? Weather, an act of God or some handsome pilot's drunken error?" (32) I also noticed the presence of Eno's dry wit in the following lines:

Let me say, just, that we're suffering, we're staring at each other and up
into the sky, like you, and that we have, while staring, tried to act. In a first

very small step, we have as of tonight called off tomorrow's company picnic. (31)

I felt that this research into the writing of Will Eno was somewhat helpful. Eno's characters seem to have some common characteristics but I wasn't sure how much this would incorporate itself into my actual process.

I also looked for other information about Mr. Eno as his is not exactly a household name. He is an American playwright born in 1965 in Lowell, MA. On the back of one of his plays the New York Times is quoted as saying "Will Eno is a Samuel Beckett for the Jon Stewart generation." I think that like some of the works of Samuel Beckett the play *Thom Pain* is an existential piece. According to Bert Cardullo in *Theater of the Avant-Garde 1890-1950*:

Existentialists like Albert Camus argued that human beings are, individually, responsible for making themselves what they are, and that without making a free and conscious choice before taking action, one cannot truly be said "to exist" as a human being. (Cardullo 31)

Thom Pain is supremely responsible for being in the place that he is. His choices have crafted the person that he is. All the choices he has made are of his own free will. Existentialists believe that events of the past are not significant. No event has any more or less weight than any other. Thom Pain speaks about the events of his past with no additional significance on them. He talks about his dog being electrocuted just as he

talks about getting stung by the bees and just as he talks about leaving his family. Those events may have had importance at the time but as they are past they no longer have any meaning attached to them. Existentialists believe in, as Cardullo puts it, living in and acting out of the eternal present. Thom functions this way throughout the play. His thoughts transition from one thing to the next. He is really only concerned about what he is saying right now. For example, there is a chunk of dialog early in the play where Thom asks the audience what they would do if they only had one day to live and he then quickly transitions into a story about buying a chair and candle earlier in the day. At another moment he speaks about the concept of being on planet earth and then shifts his dialog to talking about the vitamins he is taking.

Existentialists believe that we are simply passing time until we die. The time we are alive is far shorter than the time we are dead. I believe this concept ties into some of the works of Beckett as well as *Thom Pain*. In *Waiting for Godot* Pozzo says to Vladimir "One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you?" (Beckett 58) Not only is Pozzo explaining that life is just that thing that happens before you die, but also that there is no more significance to being born one day or to being blind one day. Events of the past lack any meaning when compared to other events of the past. Vladimir and Estragon are simply passing time before they die. They just happen to be passing it while they are waiting for Godot. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, Krapp is simply passing the time

until he dies by listening to old recordings he has made and then recording new ones. Now with *Thom Pain*, I would say that Thom has just been passing time until he dies. That is until the moment where the play takes place. I believe at the end of the play Thom is a changed person and that he will no longer live in this fashion.

After the completion of my performances I had a discussion with my collaborator, Tad Ingram, and we talked about analyzing this play using Aristotle's *Poetics* as a lens. The six elements Aristotle discusses are spectacle, music, diction, thought, character, and plot. I decided it would be interesting to see how a contemporary play like *Thom Pain* would hold up to Aristotle's views. Several of these elements such as spectacle and music are sparsely utilized and the plot is thin at best.

After the rehearsal and performance were complete I had learned what was needed to hold the audience's attention for the duration of the play. The key ingredient was fearlessness and I believe that fearlessness is a seventh key element to drama. I felt fearlessness was very fitting as the theme of fear itself is a primary element in the play. It is one of Thom's obstacles throughout the play. In fact, the first question Tad asked me as we began rehearsals was why Thom is not afraid tonight. In the beginning I did not know.

In the very beginning of the play, Thom defines the word fear, albeit incorrectly. This is an icebreaker for Thom as he is first dealing with the audience. It is also important to note that the first several moments of the play take place in complete

darkness. This is Thom's way of acclimating himself to this new and unfamiliar environment. He wants to try to take some control of the situation and overcome the fear that he has. Thom states that he is afraid the audience would laugh at his "native costume." This is not really why he is afraid. He is just making this up. Thom repeatedly brings up fear throughout the play. He asks the audience if they are afraid of coming face to face with the modern mind and proceeds to tell them that there is no reason for them not to be afraid. Towards the end of the play Thom plainly states "I did everything in fear. What was I so afraid of?" (Eno 30). Thom also calls out a series of boos towards the end. This is an attempt to frighten the audience into action; the action of living a better life. A life where one helps out his fellow man and takes notice of those around him/her. Thom has spent a great deal of his life being afraid and this night was his opportunity to be fearless. He would risk engaging in a relationship with other people. Thom states at the end of the play "Ffff. Ffff. Eeeerr. A word without definition. 'Fear.' Nothing to be afraid of. Beautiful. Right." (Eno 31) At this point I feel Thom has finally overcome his obstacle. He is no longer afraid. Here the Major Dramatic Question of the play has been answered. The Major Dramatic Question being why is Thom here. Thom is here to overcome his fear, his fear of relationships. In overcoming that fear he has rid himself of the demons from his past that are all tied to relationships. His relationship with his dog, his mother, his father, the woman and himself. When we see Thom dispel the presence of the boy, Thom has performed the last rite he needs to do to complete this exorcism. After he has done this he says "Important things with

happen, now. I promise." (Eno 31) Thom has finally won and because of the success of my project I feel that I have too. I managed to put on what I believe was a successful production of this show and along the way overcome some of my own fears.

CHAPTER TWO: FEARLESSNESS (AFOVIA)

Fearlessness is a state of mind. When entering into the process of rehearsing and performing *Thom Pain* I certainly was not thinking that anything I was doing was going to be considered fearless. Policemen are fearless. Soldiers are fearless. Doctors are fearless. I never really thought of an actor as displaying fearlessness. Now I would never say that the fearlessness an actor displays is quite the same as a policeman or soldier, but fearlessness is the quality of being free of fear and that freedom allowed me to do my job without undue regard for the consequences.

Aristotle's elements have little to do with actors themselves. They are more focused on the actual script (poem) and the physical staging of it. At first I thought this would be a roadblock in my approach to my thesis, but I decided that focusing on an aspect of the actor is paramount to truly analyzing a piece of drama. A play can be picked apart only on the text but this is really only half of the picture. A good script performed by bad actors can negatively affect an audience's perception of a performance. Likewise a bad script performed by good actors can also affect an audience's perception. In Aristotle's *Poetics* the elements he described were tied specifically to tragedy and in a tragedy the full effect of the piece is greatly affected by the performers. Looking at any famous tragedy, is not the tragedy more effective when the performers are good? The answer is yes. One aspect of good performers is fearlessness. This was a quality that I would bring to my process of staging *Thom Pain*.

My first act of fearlessness would be in selecting this play in the first place. This play is not what I would consider a conventional piece of theatre. The play defies the traditional structure of a play as the subject and theme are almost negligible. Also I found it hard to pin down an inciting incident. Many things happen to Thom that could cause his internal conflict but some aren't revealed until late in the play. The play is littered with exposition. The audience is given it throughout the play.

Instead of being afraid of the unconventionality of the piece I chose to embrace it. It is just one man talking to an audience about his life. I would have to be the central point of focus for over an hour. An audience by its nature is there to evaluate, to assess. I would be the single object they were assessing for the duration of the show.

As the play is a one man show, there is a lot of dialog. I knew that if I was afraid of forgetting my lines I would be in trouble. This leads me to another point regarding fearlessness. I think being fearless also is equated with some level of trust on the part of the person being fearless. A trust that you have prepared enough to handle whatever situation you are placed in. The night of my first performance I did spend some time backstage feverishly making sure I remembered the lines. My heart was pounding in my chest, but I decided that I would trust that I knew the words because I knew the character. I had lived with this character for several months and I knew that that was all I needed to trust in. During my first performance there came a time when I did forget what the next line was. Instead of panicking I chose to have Thom pace in a circle until

the words came to me. It felt like something the character would do if he didn't know what to say.

Tad expressed to me how I had brought fearlessness to the rehearsal process itself. Throughout I was willing to try literally anything with no regard for how it made me look. At one point Tad asked me if I thought that the character might pull his penis out and slap someone in the face with it. Granted this was not an avenue we chose to go down because it didn't seem in line with Thom's character but throughout the process Tad and I thought that at any time Thom might do just about anything. What was somewhat difficult for me and one of the areas where I was not as successful was in portraying Thom as a real jerk. Thom is a guy who is just messing with the audience. This was not Thom's intent throughout the piece but Tad and I discussed that at any minute Thom might feel like just punching someone in the audience. This I would say is not my standard type. I am actually someone who is a people pleaser and to portray someone like Thom who I believe is far from a people pleaser was difficult. Despite this fact I chose to disregard any concern for the ramifications of failing at this. During the performance I felt that I became disconnected from the audience when I would try to play the jerk. With further exploration of this piece this would be the first area I would address.

At some level Thom must be willing to fail. The same would hold true for me as the actor. In fact, one of my biggest fears in life is failing. This was most definitely an

area where fearlessness proved to be invaluable. Tad and I spoke at length that it would be hard to say whether people would or wouldn't enjoy this play. I figured that if they understood the play then they would like it. This was a pretty big "if" since the audience is not given a real explanation as to why Thom is there.

One of my biggest hurdles during this process was to give up my efforts to get the audience to understand. I sometimes wasn't sure I understood exactly what was going on so I knew that if I didn't, the audience certainly would not. As an actor I sometimes fall into the trap of indicating to the audience what I am experiencing. Whether it is with hand gestures or facial expressions, these moments are obviously manufactured and occur as fake. Every time I felt that a moment was to get the audience to understand I had to either reel myself in or have Tad do it for me because those moments simply weren't genuine. At one moment in the play Thom pulls out a letter and the stage notes say "*He prepares to read the letter aloud. Then perhaps sees something in it he hasn't seen before. He smiles, reads the letter to himself. He is further moved. Close to tears, though still restrained, in control.*" I first decided that I needed to mouth some words to indicate to the audience that I was prepared to read the letter aloud. Not necessary. I had to trust that audience didn't necessarily need to know that I was about to read the letter. In fact Thom says right before he pulls out the letter that perhaps the letter will explain something to the audience, so it is a given that Thom was going to read the letter aloud to them. Next I struggled with how I was going to depict being close to tears. I tried to put content into the letter that would actually

bring me to tears but that didn't seem to work. I finally decided that if I honestly was portraying the character and reading the letter as if I was that character then I needn't be concerned if the audience got that I was sad. I needed to trust.

Another example of my desire to indicate occurs very early in the show. In the dark Thom pulls a piece of paper out of his jacket preparing to read something he has written from the dictionary. When rehearsing this scene I would fumble with the paper so I was sure to make enough of a rustling noise so the audience would get that I had pulled a piece of paper out of my pocket. When I would do this Tad would say "Don't indicate that you are pulling the paper out. Just pull the paper out."

These previous examples are all of an internal variety I would say. These were displays of mental or emotional fearlessness. There were also moments of physical fearlessness. Early on Thom says "-to employ the popular phrase we use today to express our brainless and simpering tolerance of everything, the breakdown of distinction, our fading national soul – whatever." At this moment I fell backwards and both my legs were at an angle such that each leg looked like a "V." At times during rehearsal I worried about whether I would hurt my back or my head or that my knee might pop. I really felt strongly that Thom would do something weird like this at that moment in the play so I knew that I wanted to keep this in. I rehearsed it many times and trusted that when it came time to do it I would not hurt myself.

At several instances in the show Thom moves out into the audience and climbs over the chairs in limited lighting. If I managed to step on a chair wrong or lose my balance I could easily have hurt myself. Again I felt the action of going out into the audience was representative of Thom's character and I didn't want to play it safe and use the aisles. In the few days I was in the space leading up to the performance I spent a lot of time navigating on top of chairs and working my way through the seats. Of course this was not the perfect test for this as there were no people in the audience during this. Once again I trusted that I had prepared enough for this to be successful and that no injuries would occur.

In yet another display of fearlessness Tad and I changed the staging of the play just hours before my first performance was to begin. Tad had this idea that at the end, Thom would imagine that he was being applauded by the audience and that he was in fact a king of some kind. He had risen above his place in life. I would then slowly wave to the audience and proceed to make my way out of the theater as if I were marching. We literally rehearsed this one time but I felt that it fit with the character and the place in the story and so I was willing to give it a try at the end of the play.

During the rehearsal process Tad had created an image for me that I found useful throughout the entire rehearsal and performance process. He equated an actor to someone who jumps out of a plane with a parachute and that that person had packed his/her own parachute so that he/she knows it is packed correctly. If I prepared (packed

my own parachute) then when it came time to perform I would have nothing to fear. I would not leave anything in the hands of others. This last part I applied to the audience. I would not leave in their hands the ability to decide whether I was successful or not. I knew there was a chance the audience would think this play was weird or bizarre or not really understand it at all. This play could have been a complete failure, the audience could have hated it, became bored with it, or a myriad of other responses. This was difficult for me as I have a tendency to allow my worth to be determined by other people and that I believe my performances are successful only if people like them. I had to shed this fear of myself or the piece not being liked. I was going to be the one to judge whether I was successful or not. I grew to realize that by going through the process, preparing as much as I could, being open to anything, and giving up my fears that my project would be a success and it was.

CHAPTER THREE: SPECTACLE (OPSIS)

Spectacle as outlined by Aristotle in his *Poetics* refers to the visuals of a play, visuals that are used to create the world of the play. Aristotle felt that it was the least important aspect of his six elements of drama as it had little to do with the actual poetry of the piece. Audience members often believe that Spectacle consists of set, props, costumes, lighting, and any special effects used but since all we had to work with was a chair and some steps for the set, a handful of props listed in the play, some minimal lighting listed in the script, and a single costume worn by Thom I knew Tad and I would have to spice things up if we were going to engage the audience for the duration of the play. Spectacle was minimal in this piece and I felt like that was why it needed to be addressed from the beginning. In an era of theater where budgets are big and plays are filled with pretty costumes, nice sets, and cool lighting I had a play that didn't have any of that. I also felt that as the play starts very abruptly and with limited explanation as to what is going on it would be important to give the audience something to see. I spent some time thinking about what I wanted the audience to feel or think when seeing this piece. I wasn't sure whether they would have the experience I wanted for them. First off I wanted them to laugh. Comedy is difficult because what is funny to one person is not necessarily funny to another and just because I think something is funny doesn't mean anyone else will. I did consider that the script contains some witty text that I feel intelligent people would find humorous. I knew that I was going to have an

intelligent audience so I did believe that moments of the play would make the audience laugh. When Tad and I sat down and began to put our heads together regarding the staging of *Thom Pain* we knew that we had a fairly blank canvas to work from. The play takes place in a theater and I knew it was important to determine just what Thom was doing in this theater in the first place, at least for me. I thought that if it wasn't clear to the audience what was going on then they would be confused and would not pay attention. If Tad and I could decide upon an "introduction" then perhaps it would inform our decision as to how to create our world. Tad and I discussed the possibility that Thom had into this theater trapping an audience that had come to see another show. Tad even thought it might be cool to board up the doors with 2X4s but this would most definitely be a fire hazard. I suggested to Tad that I put up flyers advertising a showing of some other play (*Cats* for instance) and that the audience truly wouldn't know what they were getting into. Tad and I determined we really couldn't board up the doors as that would cause a fire hazard and that falsely advertising another show would perhaps irritate people.

We discussed that the stage was set with props from some show that was being performed there. We set up a series of five chairs set in a semi-circle with music stands in front of them. Tad and I went back and forth regarding the idea of whether Thom had broken into this theater or if he had paid some sort of rental fee to use it for the night. I we had decided that he had broken into the theater that would have added an element that didn't further our story so we ultimately decided that Thom had rented the theater

and that he had hung up flyers around town to promote his evening. I thought it would be interesting for Thom to show up early and clean up the stage to set up for his show. I wanted to come up with some more ideas for our initial staging so I read several reviews of past productions. One review explained how Thom used a large mirror to show the audience their reflections in an obvious metaphor for getting the audience to look at themselves. This got Tad and I thinking about how we could incorporate mirrors into our production. Tad just happened to have a box of 1X1 square mirrors. We discussed the possibility that Thom had come across a box of mirrors. Thom could set these mirrors up on the music stands and position them towards the audience at various moments throughout the play. Tad suggested that at times when Thom is angry he might break one of these mirrors. Tad taped up several mirrors so that they would break, but not shatter into a bunch of pieces. I ran some tests and the mirrors worked well. They broke and made nice shattering noises. We went with this idea for a few days of rehearsal but ultimately it was just unnecessary business and I felt little motivation as for why Thom would actually go through this process. It seemed rather like a veiled attempt for the audience to look at themselves and Thom is much more straight forward.

As our staging ideas continued Tad and I began to come up with more and more ideas for the opening. Tad suggested that Thom come in and find confetti all over the floor and that perhaps he would sweep it up before the show started. Tad and I spent several hours choreographing the pattern that Thom would sweep up the stage. I

rehearsed it several times and took about a page of notes detailing the blocking to perform this portion of the show. We also discussed Thom bringing on an old cassette player and playing some pre show music while he was sweeping up the theater. After several days of working with this concept in rehearsal we ditched it as well because it didn't further our story at all. It was only some stage business that may or may not get the audience more into the mood of the show. I wanted the work to be more about the character than about trying to get the audience to figure out what was going on.

Tad and I then began to delve into the possibility of adding another character to the show, a stage manager. The script makes several references to a stage manager, but the character is never seen. I wondered how I might incorporate this character into the performance. This person could in a sense act as my stage partner at times. Tad and I discussed exploring the idea that the stage manager might operate my cassette player for the preshow music. Ultimately the idea of the cassette player was removed because it was just more additional stage business that might have been used to set the mood for the audience and it didn't really bring anything to the production. We maintained the idea of the stage manager as a presence during the show but I only focused on him a few times during the performance. One of those times was at the moment the circular light is used to denote the presence of the child that Thom speaks about.

The idea of adding a light to signify the location of an invisible character came about fairly early in the rehearsal process. During rehearsals I began to signify a location on stage where this boy might be. It occurred first during the story where the audience is introduced to the boy. Tad then encouraged me to continue to utilize the same location when discussing the boy. The idea for adding a light came soon after and it seemed to fit. The stage manager would be responsible for the existence of the light. Tad and I had decided early on that Thom had not given a lot of instructions to the stage manager, only that the show should begin in total darkness. During the story of the boy the stage manager decided that it would be a good time to use a light and the presence of the light would fascinate Thom. The presence of this light also allowed us to setup the removal of the light at the end of the show when Thom has finally exercised his demons from childhood. It also gave us the opportunity to have the light come back on after Thom has left.

Another element that was added to the production was the moving of the chair. The script doesn't indicate much stage direction utilizing the chair but through rehearsal the chair became a safe zone for Thom. When Thom feels like he has a message that requires the audience's utmost attention I would bring the chair downstage center. I used this action right after an audience member has got up and left. Thom has determined that maybe the audience isn't paying attention and needs to be jarred a bit, but at this moment Thom himself is jarred by the man's exit and he is not completely present with the audience and finds that he needs to distance himself from them. This

was an opportunity for me to utilize another technique with the chair; the act of bringing the chair back upstage by the steps to create that distance from the audience. During rehearsals I kept note of some specific chair blocking but in the performance I would move the chair whenever and wherever it felt natural. I would also sit in it when I felt Thom needed to slow things down a bit or when he was upset. I did this when Thom becomes upset with the audience and says "Do me a favor. If you have a home, when you're home, later, avoiding your family, staring at the dog, and they ask you where you've been, please just don't say that you were out somewhere watching someone being clever, watching some smart-mouthed nobody work himself into some dumb-ass frenzy." (Eno 16-17) At this point Thom is really a bit frantic and he needs to create this distance.

Another element of spectacle that was added was the act of bringing an audience member up on stage. It was another element of spectacle that seemed in line with who the character of Thom Pain was. Thom is desperate to connect with people and I saw bringing a woman up on stage as an opportunity for Thom to at least connect with a single person. If Thom can connect with this woman then he had hope for connecting with the rest of the audience. I believe these moments also added a level of intimacy with a woman that Thom has been looking for since his previous female relationship ended.

As the idea of bringing the woman on stage was born so was the act of Thom climbing over the chairs into the audience. At times throughout the show Thom is searching for control and working his way into the audience to pick out a subject gives him that control. After seeing a woman get snagged out of the audience there was the possibility that the audience is now left wondering if they are next, so that when Thom starts creeping through their midst there is some tension created. At this stage in his story Thom is looking to exert some power over them.

Another element of spectacle that was developed late in the rehearsal process was my slow walk down the steps at center stage after I had brought one of the audience members up on stage. Thom recites a list of short sentences that reference various things that have happened to him during the course of his life. Tad and I had discussed many ways that this list could be played. I tried it while pacing maniacally back and forth across the stage. I tried it by sitting at the beginning of the delivery and then rising as the emotions begin to rise up in Thom. This moment is part of the climax of the show and I thought it was very important that it was performed in a way that I thought spoke to the character of Thom. Thom is internalizing all that has happened to him and I made the choice to take it slowly as it would be indicative of the way Thom was processing all of this information. I sped up my delivery towards the end as I felt as if these ideas are all starting to crash down on Thom. He gets to the bottom of the stairs and all of it has hit him.

A final element of spectacle that was successful was the act of Thom leaving and me not returning for a curtain call. This was one of the moments that I felt was truest to the production that I was trying to create. The act was unconventional and I felt this was appropriate given the unconventionality of the piece. I personally have never seen a play where the actors did not return to the stage at the end and so I felt this would be an interesting approach to the conclusion of the show. I looked at this decision first as an actor and then as the character. For me the actor I believe it added a level of realism I was looking for. For the character, Thom's performance is not about receiving accolades or compliments but on telling his story and working through his fear. I don't believe Thom would even know to come out after his performance either. I also felt that the lack of my return to the stage, as the actor, was needed to setup the return of the light.

Thom Pain does not include a great deal of spectacle but through the rehearsal process and the exploration of who Thom is I felt that the amount of additions Tad and I utilized were just right and just what the production needed.

CHAPTER FOUR: MUSIC (MELOS)

Music as posited by Aristotle refers to anything aural within a play. *Thom Pain* has very few sound effects and really doesn't specify that any music is part of the show. Again there were numerous possibilities to add musical elements to the show. I really found no place for specific sound effects in the show but really wanted to incorporate some music into the show. I knew I wanted preshow music but initially wasn't sure what music I wanted to use. Early on Tad and I discussed the option of having Thom bring an old fashioned cassette player to the stage and playing the pre show music himself or having a stage manager play the music for him.

During an early piece of dialog, Thom references the word "whatever" several times. This got me to thinking about using the song "Whatever" by the band Godsmack. I liked the song and thought that the lyrics might be relevant to Thom. The first verse is as follows:

*"And I wonder
Day to day
I don't like you
Anyway
And I don't need your
Shit today
You're pathetic
In your own way."* (Godsmack)

I felt that this could sum up Thom's outlook on life. He seems to have a great dislike for most people. He thinks they don't really take advantage of the opportunities they have,

they don't watch out for their fellow man. I discovered thought that at this point in the decision making process I was just trying to set up an opportunity to play a song I liked. It didn't really have anything to do with the story. I was trying to force it to be appropriate. I also felt that rhythmically it was too fast. The music is of a style that is considered heavy metal and Thom is not a heavy metal guy. He has some anger inside but it is not displayed in a way that felt indicative of this style of music.

I still wanted music at the beginning of the show and at this point Tad introduced me to some Bob Dylan music. I knew some of his more popular tunes but Tad is a Bob Dylan scholar and so he brought me a series of songs to see if they fit. A particular song that struck me was *Desolation Road*. The music is much slower than the Godsmack song I had looked at. I felt that there was also a laid back quality to the music that was consistent to the way Thom has lived most of his life. Most of his life up until this point that is. Thom has not made a lot of rash decisions in his life. It is almost as if he has been a spectator to his own life for a majority of his time on earth. There is also a distinct repetition of the music that I felt could almost lull the audience to sleep before the performance began. Perhaps that would make the beginning of the show more jarring to them. The song is also folksy and painted a picture for me of a homeless man making his way through the world. Throughout the rehearsal process Tad and I talked about whether or not Thom was indeed homeless. During one moment Thom describes the boy, now a man, as follows: "He's picking up trash, eating in doorways, eyes down, an expressionless expression." (Eno 26) Thom is really describing himself

and his words point to his own experiences as a homeless man. I also felt that as the song is over 11 minutes long and seems to tell a bizarre story about the fictitious place of Desolation Road, that it fit into our production.

I also wanted music to close the show and decided to stay in the vein of Bob Dylan. Tad brought me a song that he felt was appropriate called *Is Your Love in Vain?* The music is again rather slow and rhythmically it moves like a parade march. The song also has a majestic quality and Tad gave me some ideas about how we could stage a majestic exit for Thom. Tad described to me a scene out of the movie *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* where Quasimodo is being led in a processional around town because he has been declared the king of fools. The people watching are laughing at him but Quasimodo doesn't seem to care because he truly feels like a king. For the closing of the show Tad and I staged Thom's exit in a vein similar to that of Quasimodo. Thom would leave the stage and wave to the audience as he slowly walked off stage. Thom was much like Quasimodo in that he maybe be perceived as a fool or a nobody but Thom feels like a king because for this night he has overcome his fears. Thom knows who he is and is delighted in his discovery.

Another aural element of the play that was not music specifically was my voice or lack thereof. The most telling moment of silence takes place when Thom comments on his rich interior life. This silence is specified in the script. Through rehearsals I tried several techniques while maintaining the silence indicated in the script. I worked on

simply staring at the audience for a minute and a half. During rehearsals I imagined various people sitting in the audience and made internal comments to myself. Witty things like "This person is ugly", "This person looks like a field mouse", "This guy needs a new haircut", and so on. This would be the plan until I actually got into the performance space. After looking around the room I noticed a particular light on the ceiling that caught my eye. I then decided that the ceiling would become my focus during this moment of silence. During performance I took note of different things I noticed on the ceiling, particularly the placement of lights. I hoped the silence during this portion of the show would draw the audience in. That they might be on the edge of their seat wondering what was next.

Another moment of silence specified in the script is the reading of Thom's letter. I had written out a letter so I actually had something to read. This allowed for genuine emotions to be displayed on my face. At this point in the play, Thom is to be near to tears and during rehearsals Tad suggested that I write a letter that could have come from my mom. My mom has crippling arthritis and she would have a very hard time writing a letter. The thought of this brought me to tears, but I chose to instead write an imaginary letter from Thom's woman. The letter was a plea from the woman to reach some closure with Thom and in the letter she was asking to meet him. I had decided that Thom did not go to meet her.

As for the aural moments where I actually was speaking, one of the most profound and early discoveries was the use of a soothing voice while telling stories of the boy. Tad had asked me during rehearsals to talk to the audience like I was telling a story to a bunch of children. This idea worked for me because early on in the play I felt like Thom believes he is superior to the audience and would not treat them as equals. I used the concept of storyteller during the moment when Thom is speaking about the storm that takes place the night his dog died. I chose to lower my voice and to speak at a slower pace to try to build an ominous mood for the audience. This was an idea that I had tried in rehearsal and it just seemed to stick.

During an early moment in the play, Thom asks the audience the question "When did your childhood end?" (Eno 12) The section of text ends with a stage note that Thom has shown too much emotion and must undercut this showing of emotion. To me Thom was becoming a little frantic here. I chose to speed up my delivery of dialog to indicate the Thom's growing panic.

Another segment of text that I used a progression in vocal pace was during the laundry list of "ways and means to live and die." (Eno 13) I felt Thom was again working himself into a frenzy through this list and the increased speed would show this. It is almost like Thom is becoming a little manic here. I also chose to add a bit of a southern dialect to some of the text. During rehearsals Tad painted for me the image of

a southern sheriff prancing around on stage and I felt like this moment in the play was a perfect opportunity for Thom to mess around with the audience.

One instance where I employed a slower vocal delivery is during Thom's ramble near the end of the play. Thom begins with the line "I miss her" (Eno 29) and then proceeds to ramble off fifty-one more sentences that sort of sum up everything Thom has talked about throughout the show. The stage notes in this section are as follows: *"The following lines, all the way up to 'Now I'm here,' rise up in him in waves of feelings, wild feelings, which he is just trying to withstand."* This to me indicated that perhaps these lines should be said at an increased pace as the list progressed. I worked at practicing the lines so I could speed through them, but during the actual rehearsals in the performance space it occurred to me that the lines might be delivered in a slower manner. I spoke these lines as I am descending the stairs that were on the stage. I felt like Thom was somehow coming "down to earth" through this moment and I felt that a slower line delivery was appropriate.

I thought upon first glance that music was a weak piece with regards to this show but with a play that consists of just one man talking there were many opportunities for me to do different things with my voice, all of which were successful.

CHAPTER FIVE: DICTION (LEXIS)

Aristotle states in his *Poetics* that diction is expression of thought by means of language (Aristotle 15). As I was about to begin rehearsals one of my initial thoughts was how I was going to memorize all this language. I began working on the lines about a month before rehearsal was to begin. I spoke to Tad and asked his thoughts on memorizing the play before the first rehearsal. He said that in some instances memorizing lines before rehearsal can be dangerous as an actor can get stuck doing his/her lines the same way all the time. Not a good place to be when working in scenes with multiple characters as the actor can become trapped in doing the lines the same way over and over. This can lead to an actor becoming confined to doing a scene the same way and not leaving oneself open to react to what he/she is being given by his/her scene partner. In the case of this play, my only scene partner would be the audience and I wasn't going to have one of them around for quite some time. Early in my memorization process I would first get the lines down so that I knew what they were. Then I would practice saying the lines very slowly. Next I would say them very quickly. At this point I would make notes on particular lines that I felt sounded good slow or fast. I also would rehearse my lines in various places. I had gone to visit my parents in Sioux Falls, SD over the summer and spent a lot of time in their garage rehearsing. I would take bike rides through town and work on my lines while riding. I also went to a park close by parents and spent time walking through nature and reciting my lines. Despite

all this I still came into rehearsal with certain lines or phrases that I gotten stuck saying the same way. This was not necessarily bad unless the delivery of the line sounded fake. This was particularly a problem with the first line of the play, "How wonderful to see you all." I had gotten into a habit of breaking the line up into two pieces, "How wonderful" and "to see you all." The problem with the delivery was that it didn't sound like I really felt that it was wonderful to see them. This is not to say that I necessarily needed to deliver the line for the audience to get that I felt it was wonderful to see them unless that was the message I wanted to convey. This was however the message I wanted to convey. Tad and I spent quite a lot of time just working on this one line. This was probably the first place where Tad and I began discussing internal monologue. I needed to know what mine was if I was going to truthfully deliver the line. My internal monologue for this line was "It's great that you are all here." Having an internal monologue allowed me to open up and break free of reciting lines the same way.

Thom is a man of language. He begins the play by quoting, erroneously, from the New Century Dictionary of English, the one book he owns. In fact it is one of the only real possessions he has. I got the sense reading the script that Thom likes to play with language. He uses many one word sentences like "anyway", "now", "so", and "there." In Thom's world these words are sufficient to stand on their own. When reading the script I had to throw conventional grammar out the window because Thom doesn't speak in conventional grammar. He says whatever he is feeling when he feels it. This also made memorizing difficult. Again I turned to internal monologue.

Preparing an internal monologue allowed me to know what I was saying when I was saying it. As an example there is a moment after Thom has explained to the audience that there are some things that are not in their control. He says "I'll wait for the laughter to die down. I still sense some laughter. There. Wait. Now. There." I had to come up with my internal monologue if I was to make sense of "There. Wait. Now. There." Mine was as follows: "There. (I am in control so you will all stop laughing.) Wait. (There is a person in the audience who is still laughing.) Now. (You all had best be quiet if you know what's good for you.) There. (I finally have some peace and quiet and can continue). Had I not done this work my performance would have appeared as fake and the character of Thom Pain would not have come off as believable.

CHAPTER SIX: THOUGHT (DIANOIA)

Thought as defined by Aristotle is basically the thinking ability of the character.

Thom is a thinker. The General Performance Notes from the play state that “The lines Thom Pain speaks are how he talks, and they demonstrate how he thinks and feels. There are a lot of ‘switchbacks’ and changes-of-direction in the script. He thinks and feels quickly and he changes his mind a lot; we all do.” (Eno 4) I chose to analyze the element of thought by delving into the transitions that Thom goes through; his “switchbacks” and changes-of-direction. I looked for moments in the play when it may not be readily clear why Thom has changed his train of thought from one topic to the next. The very first two lines of the play indicate just such a transition. Thom says “How wonderful to see you all. I should quit.” Here I made the decision that Thom is genuinely happy that there are people there to see him but that he is nervous about being up in front of all these people and so he feels he needs a cigarette to continue. He then decides that he does not need that cigarette to continue and that he is capable of going on without it. Soon after, once the lights are up, Thom tells the audience that there are some things that are not in their control. He then says “I’ll wait for the laughter to die down.” At first I wasn’t sure why Thom says this and since it is not spelled out in the script I knew that I needed to decide why Thom was saying this. Tad and I came up with the idea that when Thom was in high school he had got up in front of the whole lunch room and asked everyone if they wanted to come to an after prom party at his

house where his mom would be serving cupcakes and punch. Everyone in the lunch room laughed at him. Thom is now up in front of a group of people and that memory of being laughed at arises in his thoughts and thus he responds as he does.

Another change in thought occurs after Thom first tells the audience about the little boy. He finishes his story by saying "Picture ash blowing across a newly blue sky. Now go fuck yourselves." Throughout the story of the boy I decided that Thom is trying to reel the audience in; to give them a false sense of security. The "Now go fuck yourselves" line is Thom's way of messing with the audience.

Thought also has to do with the subject and theme of the play as opposed to story. The subject of *Thom Pain* is fear and the theme is that fear is debilitating and chains one to a life of misery. Thom is leading just such a life. Thom lives in isolation. His fear of relationships has left him in this isolation. He is unwilling or unable to forge any new ones. That is until now. If we can say that dramatic action is a change in relationships, a moving forward, then this is what occurs through the course of the play for Thom. There is a change in relationship between Thom and the audience. The people in the audience did not know who he was before tonight but after the evening they are left knowing many details about Thom's life. There is also a change in relationship between Thom and the space that he is in. Assuming Thom is coming out onto this stage for the first time, then through the course of the play he becomes aware and has a greater knowledge of the place he is in.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CHARACTER (ETHOS)

Another element of Aristotle's six elements of drama is character. Characters are an essential part of drama. Without them we really have no play. In *Thom Pain* there is but one character, Thom Pain himself. As Thom is the only character, a thoroughly fleshed out character analysis would be essential in staging a successful production of this play. As I began to work on the character I thought about some basic acting principles. In a scene actors talk about what they are trying to do to their partner and decide what they need from them. In the case of this show, my scene partner would be the audience. What do I want or rather need from them? What am I trying to do to them? My first thought is that Thom is trying to make a connection with them. From the text of the play it seems clear that Thom has not had too many significant connections in his life. This is a last ditch effort by him to connect to someone. One of the aspects about this play that I really enjoyed is that it is open ended. Eno does not give much of Thom's back story. All that is given are the words that Thom says. Thom had a strong connection to his dog. He had a strong connection to a woman once. It seems he did not have a strong connection with his family. Thom says that on the day his dog died he came home and "[n]o one noticed him, the change in him." (Eno 12) Thom went through the house looking for someone to comfort him and found no one. When Thom was older he finally left home and "[h]is mother wept, due to some unrelated malady" (Eno 26) and his father "waved goodbye." (Eno 26)

In approaching the idea of connecting to the audience I focused on some basic acting concepts. One of the earliest areas I focused on were my tactics; the tactics I would use to try and connect with the audience. At times I employed humor. If I could get the audience to laugh perhaps they would feel at ease with me and want to get to know my character. At times I used the element of fear. I tried to scare the audience. Specifically I wanted the audience on their toes considering whether or not I might pluck one of them up and bring them on stage. This tactic was not used to connect with them but rather to show them that I was in control. If I was in control then the audience might be more prone to pay attention to me. At other times I used my own vulnerability as a tool. Perhaps if the audience can see who Thom is and in seeing that feel sorry for him then they might be more interested in connecting with him. Sometimes Thom becomes too vulnerable and has to try to protect himself. At these moments I would try to alienate the audience. This alienation would take the form of Thom acting like a jerk or doing something to irritate the audience.

I also used imagery to help in my process. I used the imagery of a fisherman trying to reel the audience in like fish. Sometimes I would go for one member at a time, sometimes for more than one. This imagery helped in my thought process of just who the character of Thom is.

In building the character I also looked at the performance notes in the play to see what kind of character clues I could find. I found some helpful information in the

General Performance Notes of the play. The notes first stress that the actor should be very familiar with the lines and that they should come out naturally. The lines should sound like they are being made up at the moment they are being said. The notes also state that the character changes his mind a lot and jumps around so creating ways to keep the lines organized in my head would be crucial. At times there doesn't appear to be a rhyme or reason for why the character goes from one thought to the next. This was one of my biggest challenges and is expounded upon in the chapter on thought. The performance notes also discuss that the character is sincere and serious. Despite the fact that some of the dialog is very funny, the character is not just making jokes. He thinks and feels a certain way and it is reflected in his dialog. That is not to say that the character can't find something he says as funny, only that his intention is not to make the audience laugh. This would also be an interesting dynamic that I worked on from the very beginning of the memorization process. I found that I had to fight the urge to try to get a laugh out of the audience or to say something in a way that I felt was comical. At times Thom may have been trying to get a laugh out of the audience, but at other times he was just speaking his thoughts. When I first saw the piece I thought it felt a little like a comedian's performance but on further analysis of the character and the dialog it is definitely not. I also began to think about what would be involved with making a connection with the audience as they are basically my scene partner. How was I going to get connected with the audience and maintain that connection for over an hour? I kept that in the back of my mind but did not explore this facet until later in the

rehearsal process. The performance notes also stated “People feel a lot of things, a lot of things at the same time, opposing things at the same time. Honor this, honor the largeness, the complicatedness, of human beings, and find a way to play it all as simple and truly as possible.”

Just how was I going to achieve this? This was something I would speak to my director about when rehearsals began. A final tidbit from the performance notes stated that the audience should experience Thom's feelings more in their suppression than in their expression. The emotions should seem like a soda can that has been shaken violently and could explode at any moment.

While the performance notes gave great insight into Thom's character there was a lot of work left for me to do in developing Thom. As the rehearsal process began Tad and I spent a great deal of time talking about who Thom was. One of my early fears was not to replicate the character I had seen previously. I wanted Thom to be fresh and original but also true to the clues given by the playwright. The first general character I developed was a rather timid sort of man. A person for whom it would take a great deal of courage to parade in front of an audience exposing himself emotionally. Tad and I discussed the possibility that at any moment Thom might just walk out because he was simply unable to handle the situation of being in front of the audience. I looked at the obstacles he might have in expressing himself. One clue given by the script was that Thom was not much of a social creature. The play makes no reference to him having

any real friends. As stated earlier he was not close to his family and had only one serious relationship with a woman. He was virtually invisible, but on the same hand I did not want to portray him as a victim. Despite some of these deficiencies I felt that Thom was a person who saw value in himself despite the lack of outside affirmation. I believe he also saw the good in others. I formulated this based on the idea that Thom was in fact here tonight to try to help people. He wants the audience to do as he does and look for the good in others and be willing to help their fellow man so that he/she does not end up as alone as Thom did. I also believe Thom wants to show this audience that despite the tragedies he has faced in life, he is in fact alive. He is proud that he has overcome adversity and that pride has taken the form of a chip on his shoulder. That chip is not always on display but it does raise its head when Thom is messing with the audience. Thom feels superior because he has overcome his circumstances in life. Tad and I determined that one of the truest characteristics of Thom Pain was that the feeling of pain reminded Thom that he is alive. He didn't shy away from the pain. He embraced it. This facet of Thom's character would remain intact while other elements changed numerous times.

Despite his good intentions Thom is not always a nice guy. Tad and I spent some time discussing the performance note that Thom was not mean but cruel and that those two things are very different. To help me better distinguish the two I took it upon myself to look them both up. The most useful definition for mean (as an adjective) according to dictionary.com is "offensive, selfish, or unaccommodating; nasty;

malicious.” Then I looked up cruel and the first definition was as follows: “willfully or knowingly causing pain or distress to others.” Okay, that sounded like Thom to me. Then I looked at the second definition: “enjoying the pain or distress of others”. There was the word pain again. I looked at the third definition: “causing or marked by great pain or distress.” I found it very intriguing that the first three definitions (out of four) contained the word pain given that pain is the character’s last name. I felt that Tad and I were on the right track regarding this facet of Thom’s character. He was indeed cruel. Given this character trait it felt somewhat unnatural for a man who is timid and trying to be helpful to be at the same time cruel. As rehearsals continued one of the next major character shifts began to take place.

Perhaps Thom was not timid or concerned about being in front of the audience. Maybe Thom was just a jerk. Maybe Thom was just playing games with the audience and that he really had no intention of helping them at all. This became a very fun character trait to portray during rehearsals. I do not consider myself to be an asshole but I found that I could certainly play one. The problem with this approach soon became that if Thom was just a jerk for an hour it seemed likely that the audience may become disinterested or annoyed. Tad and I decided we would continue to explore this aspect but not to worry about the audience's reaction. Tad wanted me to explore this character just to see where things would go. We both soon found out that this seemed to be the right path to go on in approaching Thom's character. As Thom's character began to become more of a jerk Tad and I began to explore the possibility that at almost

all times Thom just wants to punch someone. He is perhaps like a caged animal, a bucking bronco. We even discussed the possibility that at any moment Thom might just pull out his penis and smack someone. He would do this just because he delights in messing with people.

Thom is a complex character and through the rehearsal and performance I felt that I authentically brought this character to life. I think it was sometimes hard for me to manage all of the facets of this character. I wanted to be true to myself as an actor and maintain my vision for Thom. At times I struggled with the vulnerability of Thom. I think Thom is putting himself out there for potential ridicule in front of this audience. Thom has to be willing to fail if he is to be successful. I didn't want to fail so that made embodying this quality of Thom's difficult for me. The difficulty occurred mostly during rehearsals. In the final performance I knew that my own vulnerability would show up. It got to the point during rehearsals that there were so many potential layers to Thom's character that it was sometimes hard to keep track of them. Thom is a man with literally no friends. That aspect of loneliness was a layer that at times I don't feel showed up clearly. Another characteristic of Thom that I worked on during rehearsals was to portray the empathy Thom feels for other people. Not all other people, but those who may be in the same position as he. I'm not sure if during my performance that aspect of feeling came out as succinctly as I would have wished.

One of the greatest compliments I received was when my wife told me that this was the first time she believed I truly was the character I was portraying. She is probably my harshest critic and coming from her this meant a lot to me.

CHAPTER EIGHT: PLOT (MYTHOS)

Aristotle thought plot to be the most important element of drama. Plot is the structure or arrangement of incidents in a play. This being the case there is not much of a plot in *Thom Pain*. I think that this allows the audience to make some decisions about the character and the story that might not be accessible had the story been more clearly defined. If the audience knew exactly what Thom was doing here and why he was doing it then the audience doesn't need to think as much. Without a clear introduction to what is going on in the play the audience gets to make up why they believe Thom is here. They get to decide who Thom Pain is. They are given clues to his character throughout the performance but with little information given about him the audience is left on their own to make some decisions about Thom. Whether they like him or not is up to them.

Digging deeper into Aristotle's definition of plot, he says that drama is in imitation of action which is whole on its own. That whole must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. "The beginning is that which of necessity does not follow anything, while sometime by nature follows or results from it." (Aristotle 15) *Thom Pain* has a beginning alright and it fits Aristotle's definition in that Thom's being in this theater does not necessarily follow any specific event. It may have. Tad and I discussed the possibility that maybe Thom was about to commit suicide before he came to speak at this theater and that based on how the evening would go would determine whether or not he took

his life. We chose not to incorporate this in any way because it is not really necessary to the play. It is not needed to explain anything that is happening in the play.

Moving on to the end, Aristotle says that "an end is that which naturally, of necessity, or most generally follows something else but nothing follows it." (Aristotle 16) This holds true with regards to the ending of *Thom Pain* as well. The story is self-contained and when Thom leaves the stage at the end of the show he is changed, but what may follow is not necessary in the experience of the play. The show is self-contained.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

At the end of my process I was proud of the work I had done. I had tackled a difficult piece of theater and was successful in the execution of it. I came face to face with some of my fears and had to work diligently at breaking bad habits. I had to be fearless.

Looking back I believe that I was given many tools during my years in grad school that helped to contribute to my success in this process. What may appear as minute or simple ideas or concepts were invaluable to me during my process. One of these areas involved the work with breath that I studied while in movement and voice class. In movement class I was taught that breath can initiate thought, movement, and action. During rehearsals I focused on taking breaths when I felt there was a real shift in direction as to where Thom was heading. I also used breath to help inspire movement even if that movement was as simple as walking across the stage or up the steps or moving my chair.

My voice work was also helpful in working with the text as there is a whole lot of it. I would look for places in the text where I could play consonants or vowels for added effect. During rehearsals I used the concepts of radiant, buoyant, and potent energy that I learned in voice class. I would try different sections of text while trying to embody one of these three energies. Sometimes a specific type of energy would feel right.

Sometimes the absence of any energy type felt right. I used the concept of buoyant energy primarily when Thom would rattle off long lists of words.

From my acting classes I was given the tools to create a thorough character analysis. This was absolutely crucial given the lack of information given about the character in the play. This leads to one of the major questions I asked as I began this process. Who is Thom Pain? With so little concrete information in the text I was left to develop the majority of it on my own. There were definitely clues in the text that led to some of the decisions I made, but I feel that the lack of some specific information about Thom (home, job, friends, etc) allowed me a great deal of freedom as an actor. This was at times fantastic and at times frustrating. I would decide on a characteristic of Thom's and then take that characteristic to the extreme. As I also learned from acting class it is easier to go too far and then reel yourself back in than to take little baby steps.

Initially I thought Thom was a guy who was just up there to show he was superior and to try to make the audience laugh. As it turns out Thom was a guy who was in a sense fighting for his life. The stakes for Thom are high. Connect with humanity or go home. As noted earlier Tad and I explored the possibility that Thom may be on the verge of suicide and depending on how the evening went he would either leave a changed man or kill himself. Granted I did not strongly pursue this angle I still feel that Thom's future path was dependent on how successful his "presentation" was.

As for the benefits I reaped from other coursework I would say that without my various history and theory classes I would not have even looked at analyzing this play against a theory that is over 2000 years old. Specifically I learned about research skills and about how a theory can be applied to drama. I also learned about writing a research paper, something I had not done for many years.

If I were to approach this piece again (and I have every intention of trying to put it on again sometime in the future) I believe there are some things I would definitely do differently. I think that because Thom is such a complex character I at times tried to layer too much into him. For example I wrote down all kinds of information about who I thought Thom was and then I would try to play these aspects or incorporate them somehow. This is not to say that I don't think a thorough analysis of character is required I just think that I bogged myself down with too many choices and sometimes out of those choices no specific choice was made. I also believe that I rushed myself at times during my process. At times during rehearsals I would speed through sections of text and Tad would have to slow me down. This speeding through did not allow me to slow down enough to experience each beat from beginning to end. Given that I have a Type A personality this rushing comes as no surprise to me. This personality type is characterized by impatience, physical tension, and an aggressiveness that can have a negative effect on the person. When working on this piece again I would take my time and work on incorporating a few specific character elements at a time. I would also chose to work on it with a collaborator verses a director given the opportunity.

I was very lucky to have worked with Tad Ingram on this piece. He did not function as a director so much as a springboard for my ideas and an idea machine himself. He was able to look at the work I was doing and offer suggestions and advice. I think that had I worked on this piece with a director that was very rigid I would not have been able to have as much success in putting this production on. I think the success for me comes from the sense I have that the character I portrayed was my genuine interpretation of him. Tad definitely had input into this and his comments and questions spurred me on to put on the best show I was capable of. I don't think there is just one interpretation of who Thom Pain is so I think it would be exciting to revisit him in the future.

If I did revisit him and had to perform this piece, for example, 8 times a week I would definitely need to make some changes for myself. I feel like vocally I would need to take better care of my voice. There were times I would leave rehearsals and I could barely speak because I had lost my voice from so much talking. This better care would start with drinking more water and tea. I would also incorporate vocal warm-ups before my rehearsals. I did this at times during my process but I usually just dove right in when Tad and I began rehearsals. I would also institute a relaxation regimen as that would help with my impatience and speed issues. I would consider daily meditation or even yoga.

Fearlessness for an actor is not the same as that for a soldier or a policeman but the trait has its place in any list of desirable actor qualities. I learned that fearlessness is not something you get and then just hold onto. As stated earlier it is a state of mind. Once I had experienced that state of mind it became a place I could go back to; something I could access.

As every actor's fears can be different, fearlessness can manifest itself in different ways. For me there was the fear of the audience not understanding or the fear of failing at my performance. For other actors the state of fearlessness would show up in other ways, but in whatever way it does show up, its existence can only increase the overall success achieved by a piece of drama.

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